

The Freethinker

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IN THE YEAR 144 of the present era, the Church of Rome solemnly condemned the heretic, Marcion, and officially expelled him from the membership of the Christian Church. The date is significant for the precise reason that in the present writer's opinion, it is the first date in the history of Christianity which can be dated at all accurately. Before 144 all is myth, legend, mystery and, at best, conjecture; we do not really *know* anything about Christian origins. Of the now canonised figures of the early Christian precursors and/or apostles, only one, John the Baptist, has any claim to be regarded as historical in the sense of being referred to by a contemporary non-Christian historian, Josephus. The rest, Peter, James, John, etc., are shadowy figures who *may*, or may not, have existed. As for the Pauline Epistles prior to Marcion (who, when the second century was well advanced, first issued them in a single volume) there is no evidence at all that they commanded any special reverence in the Christian Church; it is not known who their author was, it may even have been Marcion himself, as the French New Testament scholar, P. L. Couchoud, has suggested. We must repeat that before 144 the origins of Christianity are shrouded in darkness.

New Lights

Is that darkness now impenetrable in view of the lapse of centuries and the almost total lack of contemporary evidence regarding the new Oriental religion which made its appearance on the Roman scene about this time? There is surely a solution to every mystery? Those optimistic scholars who specialise in the hitherto insoluble problems connected with Christian origins have recently derived fresh hope from the now famous Dead Sea Scrolls. What light, if any, do these apparently almost contemporary manuscripts still in process of discovery, throw on the origins of the Christian religion?

The Scrolls and Christian Origins

A considerable literature has appeared upon what has been described as the most momentous find within the present century. But the best-known books to have appeared on this subject, such as the now well-known books of Mr. J. M. Allegro and Mr. Edmund Wilson, are in the main at least descriptive, and only draw ultimate conclusions in a very tentative fashion. Whilst orthodox Christian scholars appear to steer clear of drawing *any* ultimate conclusions at all, at least in relation to the problems directly connected with Christian origins as such. Now, however, we have a Christian theologian with a technical training rushing in where angels—or at least his Christian colleagues—fear to tread. In a book published last year, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, now available in a cheap American edition, a Congregationalist minister, Dr. A. Powell Davies, now resident in Washington, endeavours to relate the problem of the Scrolls to the vaster problem of Christian origins. Though not a specialist like Mr. Allegro, our American author is obviously au

fait with the historical and intellectual background of Christian origins; he writes as a Modernist and a quite advanced one at that, and his conclusions, if not entirely convincing, appear both valuable in themselves and stimulating to further research in this subject.

The Essenes and Christianity

Writing at second hand about the Scrolls, Dr. Davies does not add to the first-hand accounts already given by such first-hand experts as Professor Dupont-Sommers and Mr. Allegro. He does not profess to do so. What he does do, much more thoroughly and competently than his more specialised predecessors did, is to apply the contents of the Scrolls to the origins of Chris-

tianity. In his approach to this complex problem he accepts the line of a very radical branch of Higher Criticism. Without going as far as to question the actual historical existence of Jesus, he yet affirms that no life of him can ever be written, and that as accurate biographies, our synoptic gospels are largely, and our fourth gospel completely, valueless. If one wanted to be hyper-critical, one might ask how a person can be called historical when no biography about him can be written? Palestinian Christianity in our author's opinion, was originally a branch of the sect collectively designated as Essenes and only slowly disentangled itself from its Jewish original. Following a recognised school of Protestant scholarship, our author regards Paul—here presented not only as an historical character, but as the actual author of the Pauline literature—as the founder of what he terms “pagan Christianity”—that is of the historical Catholic Church. The earliest type of Essenic Christianity was later swamped by the paganised cult of Pauline Christianity. The present writer agrees in the main with this broad analysis of Christian evolution except that even if Paul actually existed, he represents rather the *starting* point of Catholic — non-Jewish — Christianity rather than the Napoleonic architect of Christian theology as presented in what the German scholar Albert Kalthoff has aptly termed “that monumental tome of Catholic theology, *The Epistle to the Romans*”. Though Dr. Davies does not venture to say so, he is after all, a *Christian* clergyman, it follows apparently from his analysis that he does not consider the “Jesus of history” as having actually had much influence on the development of the later Christian Church. Jesus, according to him was a Jewish reformer — perhaps revivalist would be the more accurate term — who was certainly influenced by the Essenes and may perhaps have been an Essene himself. His view is similar to that of Albert Schweitzer whose view of “The Jesus of History” as a revivalist preaching the proximate end of the world, our author explicitly accepts. The present writer also agrees in the main with this diagnosis: if there *was* an historical Jesus, I think that Schweitzer's Jesus is much the most credible. Obviously such a preacher was only nominally connected with what Dr. Davies describes as the “paganised Christianity” of

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins

By F. A. RIDLEY

later ages, with its Saviour gods, eucharistic sacrifices and metaphysical subtleties such as the Trinity. As our author repeatedly emphasises a Jewish "Christ" or Messiah was not a god but a *man* raised up by God. For which reason I must confess that I have never spilt much ink or even taken much interest in the problem as to whether there was a Jesus. Of course the matter would be different if Jesus had been the *real* Founder of Christianity; but even so brief a resumé of actual Church history as our author presents, is quite sufficient to indicate how purely nominal was the relationship between the primitive Galilean preachers of early Palestinian Christianity and the later Catholic Church. If, as our author plausibly suggests, Christianity actually *started* as an Essenic sect, akin to that at Qumran the library of which has been so recently discovered, it soon branched out upon paths very different from those trod in the seclusion of the Dead Sea wilderness by its Jewish Founders.

John the Baptist — the "Missing Link"

Actually the 'Missing Link' between the Qumran sect and the earlier Christian sect — whether or not it included an historic Jesus — is probably to be found in John the

Baptist. This enigmatic figure who preached the essentially Essenic rite of baptism and preached and baptised within a few miles of Qumran seems to be the "missing link" between the Essenes and the new Galilean sect. He sounds very like an Essene or ex-Essene, and even our bowdlerised and much edited Gospels make him the Master of Jesus and quite possibly the actual *Founder* of Christianity. Even much later when *our* Gospels were compiled, there were evidently *Christian* sects who regarded John and *not* Jesus or Paul as their Founder; "the Baptism of John" was, for some time, the rival of "the Baptism of Jesus". In fact, seeing that John appears to be an historical character vouched for by the almost contemporary Josephus, John may actually have been Jesus as well! the Master confused with his disciple? If the as yet partly undeciphered Dead Sea Scrolls which have already produced an authentic letter of the later Messiah, or Christ, Bar Cochba, much better known in his day than either John or Jesus, were to prove the *identity* of John and Jesus or even the subordination of Jesus to John in the primitive Christian sect, that would indeed produce an earthquake in the theological fold.

Chosen Question

By G. H. TAYLOR

FROM ONE of our many readers in Ontario, a district in which THE FREETHINKER circulates with particular effectiveness, comes the following:

When Galileo appeared before the Inquisition he asked the Church dignitaries to look through his telescope and certify his statements for themselves. They refused on the ground that his theories could not be correct as they were contrary to Holy Writ.

Is not the attitude of Freethinkers towards Extra-Sensory Perception an exact parallel? If hypnotism, telepathy, clairvoyance, etc., are facts of nature, then there is proof that mind can function apart from the physical brain. Instead of dismissing all this as nonsense, drivel, coincidence or trickery, why not examine it with an open mind?

Is it not possible that there are laws of nature unknown to materialism which at time modify the working of known laws?

T. B. G. Burch (Toronto, Canada).

First I must deny that we "refuse to look through the telescope." We *have* looked, and we have not found what our correspondent apparently wants us to find. Many articles and notes have dealt with E.S.P. in these columns. Between August 26th and October 28th, 1955, there were five full-scale articles by four different writers; and there have been other references from time to time, the most recent being in my "Science Front" of April 26th last—only a few weeks ago. In none of these articles and notes will our friend find that we have adopted an attitude "exactly parallel" to that of Galileo's Inquisitors.

On the contrary, we have examined the "evidence" of Dr. Rhine (U.S.A.) and the experiments of Dr. Soal (Britain), the two main contenders. The former failed ingloriously to meet up to Rinn's challenge, and the probability theory of Soal has been called in question. More recently it has been maintained by an American expert, Dr. R. A. McConnell, that if all the energy of the brain were broadcast, it could travel no more than one millimetre from the surface of the skull, let alone the distance to another brain.

As for Mr. Burch's next point, if he thinks hypnotism "proves that mind can function apart from the physical brain," there is a simple test. Let the physical brain be removed from either the hypnotist or his subject and *then* see if hypnotism can work!

Finally, as to unknown factors modifying the *known* ones, how can this invalidate materialism? There is a

great deal that is still unknown in every branch of science, and as it becomes known, it takes its place in the materialistic scheme of things which *is* science. Only on materialist lines is any new factor ever discovered. It is a condition of the progress of science. In order to be known, it must be tacked on to what is *already* known. Only by what is already known can it be tested.

For instance, a newly localised receptor terminal in the labyrinthine organ of the internal ear, capable of picking up distant reports, is a hypothesis that can be tested and finally proved true or false. An immaterial essence floating from one brain to another without leaving any track in causation or any path in space-time (*i.e.* without *any* dimensions whatever) is an unscientific piece of nonsense which *cannot* be tested because its terms are purely arbitrary and of the kind that science, throughout its history, has had to remove in order to make progress.

The only hope for E.S.P. would be the location of a new receptor with new properties. The "five senses" have, as the result of work by Dallenbach, Henning, Karwowski and others, been increased to something now approaching thirty, both *on* and *in* the body. But if some basis for E.S.P. should eventually be located along these lines, the title "E.S.P." would become inapplicable, because the perception would not be "extra" but merely sensory.

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL?

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING of the English Baptist Sunday School Union of Wales and Monmouthshire it was announced that the number of children attending Sunday school had decreased steadily since World War I, and there were now 2,000,000 fewer in England and Wales than 40 years ago.

WORKERS' PLAYTIME

WHO says the Bible isn't good for something? One of our friends was slightly nettled by those advertisements asking the reader to look up a particular biblical passage for his salvation. He was even more nettled by a canteen whose luncheon menu had remained unaltered for several years. One day he put a notice up on the canteen signboard: "For the eternal menu, look up Hebrews 13:8." His more curious colleagues soon found the reference: "Jesus Christ!—the same yesterday, today, and for ever."

NEXT WEEK

THERE IS NO HALF-WAY HOUSE

By G. I. BENNETT

Poor Folks' Religion

By C. G. L. Du CANN

THE RELIGION of the poorest people in England today is very different from what it is conventionally imagined to be. (By the "poorest" people, I do not mean the semi-sophisticated and over-privileged working classes; I mean the very poor and unsophisticated, of whom there are still a large number.)

In the strict sense of the word they are not Christians at all. The basic fundamentals of that faith are unknown to them. Their religion is hardly even a debased variant of Christianity. Rather is it an instinctive blend of their individual instincts and the herd instinct—what Reinhold Niebuhr calls "the basic optimism of all vital and wholesome human life"—flavoured with a dash of Christianity. Like all things human, it is very interesting. But who has studied it at first hand? To explore it, you must go to the poor themselves and note their religion in action.

As a specimen, consider the widow Mrs. Morgan. Her husband Albert (whom she called "All-but," an excellent description of him in life) died after a long and painful illness. Immediately Mrs. Morgan's religion sprang to life—as one might expect, for Death is a great stimulant to religion. She did not indulge in prayers for the dead. She strained every nerve towards "burying 'im with 'am and a proper drop of something and a motor 'ired," and providing "a properly-polished coffin with brass 'andles." Her life savings were royally spent, as well as the "club death-money." When I think of duty done nobly, I think not of Nelson or Florence Nightingale but of Alice Morgan, faithful to the end—and even afterwards.

That may be called the reality of religion as it ought to be and to do—and as it generally isn't and doesn't!

Like all her kind, Mrs. Morgan had to have "a bit in the paper." Poor All-but was far too destitute of sex-appeal and criminality to attract Press notice even in the local "rag." But his widow had been deeply edified by "In Memoriam" notices in the advertising columns and she had pondered much and deeply over undertakers' verses. She had pitifully little money for the vital necessities of life; but she was determined to spend to the hilt on her tribute to the dead. Rejecting cheap short stuff like "At rest" and "Gone but not forgotten," and even rhymed couplets, she ultimately chose the following:

"Like fallen leaves, the years slip by
But Dad's dear memory won't die.
All loved Dad, yes, and oh! how well
How deep and dear no one can tell,
God loved him too, so thought it best
To take him home to peace and rest."

—From Mum, his wedded wife for 41 years.

The cost made her behind with her rent for the first and only time in her life—paying rent being a part of her religion. Her undertaker (who called himself a mortician and funeral furnisher) believed in "getting 'em while the tears are in their eyes"; and he "got" Mrs. Morgan accordingly. But she had given her widow's mite, like the Gospel widow—and her mite was, like the other one, all she then had.

Her chosen verses are illuminating. They show how her class believes in an "after life" and "a better land"—not because Christianity teaches it, but because they want it, and feel that they deserve it. "It's only fair we should go to Heaven after what we've had to put up with here," Mrs. Morgan says. For Heaven to her is a place of compensation "fair-do's" and rest, where her toils and stresses and strains are rewarded. Hell to her is a disgusting expletive; purgatory she has never heard of. God is a bigger and better

All-but, presiding over family reunions, a real God like All-but at his best.

Mrs. Morgan's religion is "C. of E.," because "that Church belonged to All-but" since he was once in the Army. A sergeant-major asked her husband's religion and when Private Morgan said he didn't know, the N.C.O. promptly bestowed the Anglican Church upon him. Private Morgan accepted the gift; and directly she knew he had it, Mrs. Morgan also accepted it on the sound principles of "what's his is mine" and "what's a woman want with something different from her husband's religion." She has heard of other religions but acidly disapproves of them "furren churches with smelly incense. I went to one once and couldn't abide it," and "them Salvation Army with their goings-on in the street and selling *War-Crys* in the pubs."

Jesus is a good man like "we all ought to be." And that, so far as I can discover, is all that Mrs. Morgan knows or cares to know, about his adult life or his teaching. Also the Bible is "the best of books," and she "wouldn't feel comfortable without a Bible in the house"—but she does not read or even open it! Once a week she reverently wipes its covers with a dirty duster, and she honours it further by its being "kept" in the best room on the sideboard.

She has no prayer book. But she does pray sometimes. "Only when I need something bad: I don't hold with always bothering God. He must have more than enough to do and think about, if you ask me," she says. "Besides, me and All-but was always ones to be independent and never did hold with cadging nothing from no one, not like the folks of today. Some people goes to church and tries to get something out of God every Sunday. Disgraceful I call it; but I bet God reads 'em like a book and sees right through them."

For the religion of Mrs. Morgan, like all of her kind, tends to be ethical, not metaphysical. "Doing what's right as you go along" about expresses it. "Right" means what is "decent to others," and "being fair to all, includin' yourself," and respectable and conventional. Parsons are all right "in their way." That "way" means conducting the rare indispensable ceremonies of family life; but Mrs. Morgan, except for such purposes, gives them a wide berth, just as they give the Mrs. Morgans of this world a wide berth. For Mrs. Morgan is not the sort to be susceptible to the patronage of parsons, and the clergy instinctively know it. She regards them much as she regards policemen and street lamp-posts—as part of the phenomenon of a civilised modern world, and fulfilling some function. But as having nothing to do with her.

Having ascertained what Mrs. Morgan thought of the Almighty and of Jesus Christ, I could not forbear questioning her about the most-neglected Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost. Mrs. Morgan was at once on the defensive. She seemed to regard the subject indeed with a faint distaste. "The Only Ghose?" she said. "I have 'erd of 'im, but nothing much, and I don't hold with no ghoses in 'aunted 'ouses, and spirits and such. For you can be sure a lot of it's made up by people who's got frightened in the dark." I thought that went to the root of the matter and left the subject there, for I felt that an exposition of the Athanasian Creed by me would do no good to either of us.

The value of Mrs. Morgan's religion, as I see it, is that it enables, or at any rates, assists, her to endure life and to be serenely confident about death. She is to be compensated hereafter—and that suffices her in all her toils and

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

One of "This Week's Quotes" comes from the Rev. G. Tiley, the Vicar of Powick (Worcs). It is, "I find that talks on space travel add to my congregation." But surely parsons and priests must have talked on space travel ever since the Bible was accepted as God's Precious Word? What about the marvellous journey Elijah made to Heaven in a chariot? What about the voyage Jesus made in the arms of the Devil when he was put on to the Pinnacle of the Temple? And surely there is nothing in space travel or even in space fiction to equal the aerial flight of "our Lord" to Heaven entirely by his own miraculous power? He required no atomic or other power, not even a space ship. It was all done by a Divine miracle.

★

That sometimes angry young — or not so young — man, Mr. Gilbert Harding, has found (according to *The People*) that "religious persecution" in "its most diabolical form" is still rampant "in this fine free country of ours." Mr. Harding wrote that a parade of Orangemen in London "would not be a good thing." And for that he has been reviled as an enemy "of Church and State." But surely he ought to know that there is nothing more likely to bring out persecution "in its most diabolical form" than, not only the pure Protestant religion of Orangemen, but also the Christ-like Catholic religion of Rome. Mr. Harding should study the religious history of England under the two Queens — Mary Tudor and Elizabeth Tudor. The torturing and burning of heretics on both sides were just a little more than mere "reviling".

★

Even among "Protestants" there appears to be plenty of hatred. For example, we have the case of a Church of England school mistress who has been sacked by her vicar because she "taught in the Methodist Sunday School." The vicar, the Rev. T. Evans, indignantly claimed, "She went over to the enemy"—the enemy being the Methodist Church. "The Methodists are enemies," insists the Vicar. "I don't regard them as Christians. This woman calls herself Church of England — but it's like Kruschew calling himself a Conservative." We wonder what the *Daily Mail* — from which we have quoted — thinks of this typical piece of true Christianity?

★

Quite a lot of unnecessary fuss is being made about road accidents and road safety these days, for here we have the Rev. R. Wesson, vicar of St. Andrew's, Luton, giving us a simple solution. He is appealing to his flock — according to the *Daily Telegraph* — to have their cars and motor cycles "sprinkled with holy water in the interests of road safety." And he adds, "My own car is blessed, and when I buy a new car that will be blessed too." Just a sprinkle of Holy Water — and no more accidents! What heavenly bliss springs from religion and from its Divine Ministers! How brilliantly intellectual they are!

★

According to the Annual Report of the National Sunday School Union, "the Sunday School is not succeeding in its aim. Only one child in seven remains within the fellowship of the Church. The other six drift away." This is very sad news. "Our Lord" appears to be powerless in Sunday Schools — and this is particularly disappointing because the modern trend about him is not to concentrate so much on his miracles and encounters with devils and evil spirits, but on the way he went about "doing good." And "doing

good" made him appear much more like a capable Sunday School superintendent than the Son of God. It is all very disheartening — especially as the Report has nothing to suggest by way of a cure. Sunday Schools have failed — and that's flat.

★

In a like manner, the Worcester Diocesan Director of Religious Education, Canon R. Jones, sadly moans about the decrease of confirmations in his diocese. In spite of a huge increase in population in Worcester, the decrease is 37% in Worcester and the Canon is wondering whether "our methods are antiquated and irrelevant in a new age"? The mere asking of such a question is proof enough that he knows quite well they are. But much more than that. If he wants children to be confirmed he must stop them learning history, astronomy, anthropology and science in general. In other words, see that they do not get a modern education. If the Bible and only the Bible is made the base for all education, and everything else sternly repudiated, there is bound to be an increase in confirmations. Religion thrives on ignorance.

Poor Folks' Religion

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troubles as a poverty-stricken charwoman, afflicted by chronic ill-health. As to death, that mainly is an affair of "All-but" being restored to her, and a better time being had by both. Her worst worry about death is whether she will leave enough "to be put away decent" and given the sort of funeral suitable to her status as Mrs. Morgan, wife of Albert Morgan for so many years and now his respectable widow.

There is not the slightest chance of converting Mrs. Morgan from her firmly-held faith. When, greatly daring, I insinuated a doubt of her conjugal reunion after death, she was scornful. I had quoted that in Heaven there would be "neither marrying nor giving in marriage," and she retorted "I should think not, when me and All-but is married already." As to All-but not meeting her in the Better Land, why, she had never been away in her life when All-but did not come to meet her train at the station, and wait for her as a husband that thought anything of his lawful wife would do, of course. "He always came punctual in his best clothes to meet me, even if it meant leaving work early," she declared.

And I gathered that she firmly expected Albert Morgan to be punctual and in his best clothes on the Resurrection Morning to greet her on rising, or she would have something to say both to him and those responsible for the Resurrection arrangements.

But suddenly she faltered: "He did once go to the wrong platform and I had to go about looking for him," she admitted. "Do you think . . . ?"

I heard that quavering voice, I saw that aged, troubled face gazing into mine, and I felt like a murderer, conscience-stricken at his cruelty. I swore that her dead husband would be there. Punctually. In his best clothes. Waiting for her. Everything efficiently arranged by the same angels who had had experience of Christ's resurrection, and who therefore would know exactly how to restore Mr. and Mrs. Morgan to each other. I said I hope to come up just afterwards, and congratulate them and shake hands. . . .

Such is one poor woman's religion in England in this year of civilisation. Without doubt, it is the religion of many others. Superior people may sigh or smile at it; but they had much better look at their own to see whether that may not be only a more sophisticated and pretentious brand of the same basic thing.

THE FREETHINKER

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All Articles and Correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are always welcome at the Office.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

GREGORY SMELTERS and W.S.: Electrons cannot be seen by the unaided eye, but can be photographed as particles (passing through a gas) or again as waves (passing through a metal film). The Eddington quotation is: "Nowadays we can count the stars one by one on a Geiger counter as we count the stars one by one on a photographic plate". Electrons can be isolated from atoms, as in cathode rays.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs DAY, CORINA, and SHEPPARD.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston, Surrey).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, FINKEL, SMITH or CORSAIR.

Sunday, 3 p.m. (Platt Fields) Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, etc.

Sunday 8 p.m. (Deansgate Blitzed Site): Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH or WOOD.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons): Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square) — Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE.

Wales and Western Branch (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, June 30th, 7 p.m.: D. SHIPPER: A Lecture.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, June 30th, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY, "Religion and Progress."

Dagenham Branch N.S.S. (Central Hall, Bennetts Castle Lane, Bectonree; 106 or 23 B bus from Barking).—Wednesday, July 3rd, 8 p.m.: Debate between the Rev. Mr. GILL (Methodist) and COLIN MCCALL (N.S.S.), "Mankind's Need—Christianity or Secularism?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, June 30th, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "The Dead Sea Scrolls."

Notes and News

THE EMINENT American freethinker Joseph Lewis has challenged one of America's most wordy and windy religious propagandists, Preacher Jack Coe, to cure one child of polio in accordance with his fantastic claims. Lewis offers ten thousand dollars for this feat and when he made the challenge in public one of his audience raised the offer by another ten thousand. Needless to say, Preacher Coe has fought shy of putting his "healing" powers to the test.

IT INTERESTS US to note that the editor of the *Leicester Evening Mail*, Mr. Froom Tyler, is to go to another provincial paper. During his editorship he has published a great many letters from the freethinkers of Leicester and has earned their admiration as a broadminded editor. It is equally interesting to note that he is now to become editor of the *South Wales Evening Post*. He will find freethought well represented in his new area and we look forward to seeing many Freethought letters in his columns.

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AT Barnsley some months ago, as many readers will remember, an extended Press controversy was carried on between Freethinkers and Christians, the former being represented mainly by Messrs. H. Irving, H. Day and G. H. Taylor; while the Christian opposition included three reverend gentlemen. One of the latter was the Rev. O. C. Drewitt, who now writes to us: "I have now after twenty years finally dropped the use of my title as a priest and come down definitely on the anti-religious side."

★

A RECENTLY-RELEASED U.N.O. population study states that 170 babies are born every minute, 90 people dying during the same period. This means that 120,000 per day are added to the world population of 2,700,000,000. It is estimated that if this rate is continued world population will double by the turn of the century. Biggest populations are China with 582,603,417, and India with 356,879,394. The U.S.S.R. is placed third, although Russia has not held a census since 1939. Fastest rate of increase is in Catholic Latin America, 4,400,000 per year being added to the population, but Asia, with over half the total world population, adds 24,000,000 per year. Educational statistics showed that Great Britain has the highest percentage of children attending school, Scotland heading the list with 97%, England and Wales 95%, and Northern Ireland 91%. In comparison, Japan has 89% and the U.S.A. 83%.

Spencer Ceremony

AT HIGHGATE CEMETERY on June 15th the Personal Rights Association organised a ceremony of remembrance at the tomb of Herbert Spencer, including the laying of a wreath by Lord Boyd Orr, that veteran champion of individual liberty. The prime mover of the event was our freethought supporter Ella Twynam.

Half a dozen progressive movements were represented at the gathering, while Mr. H. Cutner and the undersigned attended from THE FREETHINKER. The People's League for Freedom was represented by Mr. Dunbar.

The apparent incongruity of a Socialist laying the wreath became less obvious as Lord Boyd Orr delivered his address, for he expressed the need for about twenty Independent M.P.s today who, without allegiance to a party, would make it their business to defend personal freedom to the utmost and thwart the present trend towards a Police State, instanced by telephone tapping and by "informers" in the Universities. But today, said the speaker, any candidate who deviated from the two great parties had no hope of being returned to Parliament.

While Spencer would have modified some of his opinions had he been alive today, he would certainly have been alert at the encroachments of state bureaucracy on personal freedom: without freedom of thought and speech there could be no advances in human culture and welfare.

The future of the world, he concluded, did not lie in H-bombs that no nation could use, but in those peoples with the greatest amount of freedom to create the kind of society all intelligent people want.

Mr. Henry Meulen, of the P.R.A., made a most interesting supporting speech.

G. H. TAYLOR.

The Miracle in the Monastery

(From the Portuguese of Fialho de Almeida. Translated by N.F.)

THE MONASTERY was situated in a great prosperous plain, planted with vineyards, where the olive trees with their zinc-coloured branches threw a biblical sadness. From the tops of the tower the frontiers of Spain were plainly visible. The Capuchins had been expelled from the Monastery during the last civil war. In the time of the monks the church was full of flowers, of incense, of the faithful from the neighbouring villages bringing their offerings in money and kind. But the devotion for this old ruined building with its statues and altars eaten with moths, and bulging ceilings, had gradually died down. Once a week, Padre Deus came up from the village to say mass in the church. The only people who attended were the sexton, Manuel Cabo, his wife Escolastica, their daughter, the bailiff and the farm workers.

One night, Padre Deus was found dead in bed. It was only after much pressure from the bishop that Padre Nazareth took over the parish. Gazing all round the church and pursing up his bilious-looking face, he said to the sexton: "There is no money to be got out of this . . . but with a few improvements . . . !" When the sexton got home, he grumbled to his wife: "He and his improvements!! What the devil is he talking about? The church has no lace, no vestments, the walls and roofs are falling in, the whole show from the altar cloths to the faded dossils is in tatters; St. Dominic's ears are crumbling, the worms are gnawing St. Luis' eyes out, the rats have made a nest in St. Anthony's stomach . . . and the fool talks of improvements."

One day, inside one of the statues, Manuel Cabo came across an ancient document describing a miracle which took place in the monastery in the year 1570. It read as follows: "One bleak night of January, no sooner had all the monks retired to bed than they heard a voice calling out in the darkness: 'Get out Tempter! Dear God, do not leave your humble servant in agony and danger!' They then heard a sound from the church as of a beast roaring and groaning. The good Senhor Abbot led his brethren to the church where they saw an enormous black dog emitting fire from its eyes and mouth. It was so horrible a sight as to fill the monks with dread! On the altar of the statue of Our Lord of the Cross, the candlesticks had been knocked down and the altar cloth smeared with dribble. A young novice named Seraphim, prostrated in ecstasy, was giving thanks to God for having delivered him from the black dog, which was Satan himself! As they all fell down in adoration, the black dog fled screaming. The monks were then astonished to see the statue of Christ on the Cross weeping blood. The good Abbot admonished his monks to be still more fervent in their devotions so that the fame of the miracle would spread through the whole countryside." Padre Nazareth, looking over the sexton's shoulder, hastily scanned the pages; then, as he slyly admired Escolastica's breasts he asked Manuel how much the church owed him. "I haven't been paid wages for at least six months," said the sexton.

The church tower clock struck nine and the two men left for the service. When they were safely outside the door, the priest whispered cautiously in the sexton's ear: "Suppose the statue of Our Lord again sheds tears of blood?" "Impossible!" cried Manuel, "today people haven't the same faith . . ." The priest continued "As you know, man if a bad winter comes we'll have the roof and ceiling down. . . . If we could bring this about you'd get your six months wages and we'd both be in clover. The whole countryside

would rush here to see. Get the church cleaned up; it is a veritable pigsty." Next day, amid much fuss and noise, the sexton's wife and daughter, with the great brooms used to knock down the olives, cleaned up the spiders' webs and dirt of years. Escolastica, as she passed the dishcloth over the bearded face of St. Luis, exclaimed: "Forgive me for saying so, but you are thick with dirt". The figure of Our Lord of the Cross was enormous and seemed to have been hewed roughly out of wood: two fingers were missing and the cross had been split in two as the sexton had knocked it down one night when he came home drunk — thus relieving Christ of some of his burden; the beard was all eaten by moths, its square head, covered with a battered tin, appeared the head of a grotesque Eastern god, as it hung disconsolately down.

After much difficulty, Manuel got the great statue down from its niche. After washing and scrubbing it he poured coloured water into a cavity he found in the head and screwed it on again; then dressing the image in a rich purple robe presented by the squire's mother, he got it back into its place. It seemed to Escolastica that the great figures of the Pharisees at the back sneered at seeing Christ's beautiful robe, a fact which made her furious. The ground around the altar was strewn with cypress branches. The men from the farm arrived with flowers and all knelt in adoration as Manuel recited the litany. When all the work was done, Padre Nazareth came up the steps belching loudly and complaining that he'd eaten too many olives with his dinner. The sexton explained that they had a heavy day's work as the statues were as dirty as pigs. "More respect when you speak of holy things," said the priest severely as he spotted Escolastica listening outside the door. "God is infinite in his goodness," continued Padre Nazareth "and was crucified . . ." "To save us from hell and its torments," chimed in Escolastica, who knew her catechism.

The next night, the squire's mother, an excessively devout old lady of 80, dined with Padre Nazareth. She ate an excellent meal and drank liberally of the old port. Padre Nazareth spoke to her of the glories of the old monastery and its present state of poverty and suggested that she should leave something for its upkeep in her will. She promised to consider the matter. They set out for the monastery, and on the way, Padre Nazareth painted pictures to her of God The Avenger and of the fires of Hell that she clung to him in terror, leaning on him, begging his protection and the benefit of his influence in the skies. A service was arranged in front of the altar of Our Lord of the Cross and the priest gave a sermon on Christ's journey to Calvary under the weight of His cross and of how He sweat blood. As they were chanting the litany — with so many indulgences attached to it, the sexton's daughter suddenly called out: "Blood! Christ is weeping blood!" The old lady fainted and had to be carried out.

Next day crowds came to pay their respects to the miraculous statue, with offerings of meal, oil, chickens and money. Within the year, all the priest's great hopes were realized. The squire's mother died and left a large sum to him and to the church. The fame of the miracle spread and Padre Nazareth gathered up the money and jewels, resenting the fact that he had to send ten per cent of all he received to the Pope. The young people came to sing and dance in the church square and the girls stole away to pin their letters in the folds of Our Lord's cloak asking for success in their love affairs, and not neglecting to

drop money in the box left for offerings. The crude statue which before had shed tears of blood now worked all kinds of miracles. the blind saw, the lame walked, the paralytics jumped and ran, devils fled from afflicted souls, sterile women became pregnant — all helped by Latin passages chanted by Padre Nazareth.

Innumerable industries sprang up round the scene of the miracle. Escolastica opened a shop for relics and pictures of Our Lord on the Cross. Another pious family sold an ointment for rheumatism which was guaranteed by Padre Nazareth to have touched the sacred wounds, still another family sold a homemade liquor guaranteed to cure flatulence. Padre Nazareth looked through his gold rimmed glasses, worn to give him an air of importance, at the restored monastery at his lovely new house with its terrace and wine-cellar and dreamed of a deanery. The only one who dared to be familiar with him was Manuel Cabo, the sexton, and they both agreed that they had brought back the faith to the village.

Clio's Face

By A. R. WILLIAMS

THOSE WHO FOUND school history interesting criticise the way it was presented. Not so much was it desiccated or dehydrated as biased, always on behalf of power. Orthodox teaching of history was from the attitude of the governing class, authoritarian and rigid and conservative. The scales of historical judgment were tilted before we knew it. History teachers had little regard for truth.

That abstraction may be impossible of attainment. Attempts might have been made to present a dispassionate case, so that we could make our own deductions. Is it Clio or her devotees who are snobs, representing the powerful and successful and prosperous as admirable and right, while the poor, weak, miserable and failures are loaded with obloquy for being so?

Example is the Peasants' Revolt in 1381. Perhaps it was wrong of Wat Tyler and his lieutenants and their hundred thousand followers to rebel against taxes imposed by their king. What else could they do? There were no peaceful means of redress.

They failed, and historians have despised them ever since. Our teachers had no words strong enough in condemnation of the rascals. At best it was grudgingly admitted the serfs had grievances.

Grievances! Marvel is how they endured what they did and survived at all. Plague, pestilence and famine did their best to eliminate them, while their lords and masters whipped and hanged them at the least pretext. Older, we came to understand the peasants' case, realising they rightly revolted.

Where revolution won, our teachers admitted it reluctantly. When they could, they diverted our admiration to such men as Napoleon, or sentimentalised over the Stuarts and Marie Antoinette anything to prevent us sympathising with masses of people driven into revolt against tyranny or poverty. Older successful rebellions, as that of the American Colonies, have established themselves as permissible in school textbooks and lessons.

The struggle goes on. For twenty-four years the Russian Revolution of 1917 was cursed and blackened with hearty condemnation, till Russia's entry into the World War in 1941 saved Britain from likely invasion and defeat. Now the Red Revolution is accepted sullenly, with little attempt to explain its causes, loth to concede its justification or admit its success.

On the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was

Rome our mentors talked eloquently. Subsequent investigation clouded the bright picture. Wars, battle, treacheries, dissensions, harsh penal laws with tortures and slow deaths seem to detract from the glory and the grandeur. Human lives, their freedom and happiness, their existence at all, were lightly valued.

Slavery stultifies claims to civilisation. Athens at its glorious period had twenty thousand freemen and two hundred thousand slaves. A pleasant city to live in—for the freemen.

Do the heavy buildings left in Rome and elsewhere compensate for the avenues of crucifixions after the Spartacist slave revolt? That the slaves should have revolted at all is condemnatory of their owners and the Roman Empire.

It was long before we discovered the truth about the Crusaders. They were barbarians compared with the infidels they attacked. This pro-Christian bias ran through teaching of Medieval History; in what was taught us about Moors in Spain and Jews, and the treatment accorded natives in newly discovered Western lands. The dominant Church, horrors of religious wars, and the joy with which every sect persecuted when it could get power; all were glossed over.

British Imperialism was taught as a good as well as great achievement of our rough islanders, proving their greatness; good for subject races who came under Imperial sway. To brown and black and yellow men we took benefits of civilisation. We taught them to govern themselves. Dare anyone suggest taxation and extraction of profit as features of Imperial benignity?

Lesser breeds without the law have been ungrateful. In India they revolted; made a Mutiny. No teacher mentioned the British were aliens and conquerors; that the Indians may have heard of Magna Carta, the Great Rebellion, the Revolution, the Reform Act, and much else similar, persuading themselves that principles of British liberty might be applicable to India.

Linked with the Imperial destiny was the axiom of white superiority over other colours of skin. The world existed for white people to expand in. No doubts disturbed our instructors' complacency; no reminder of how white men nearly exterminated the Redskins of North America; enslaved West Indians; profited in the East Indies; won India by force and fraud; made incursions into China before the Japanese; destroyed an indigenous civilisation in New Zealand, and ravaged the Pacific Islands till many of their inhabitants died rather than live under conditions imposed upon them by white comers.

Africa was instanced as a glorious example of European enterprise. After transporting millions of negroes into slavery, European Governments proceeded to quarrel and fight over sharing their lands. In East, South, North, West and Central Africa the white invaders take all they can, leaving natives the least possible.

Teachers loved to talk of war. True it is war has occupied too much human thought and effort, but there was no need to make it the central theme or glorify it. Much different needs to be taught. It resulted in warriors being exalted as heroes. Put simply, the man who killed the greatest number of his fellows was the greatest man.

So it appeared Governments exist mainly for war, civil aspects of society being of secondary importance, functioning only to subserve bellicose Governments. Neither did our teachers point out the most provocative and predatory Governments were European. They fought for conquests in all parts of the world, then fought each other for larger shares of those conquests.

Yet our pedagogues impressed upon us the necessity for being law-abiding. They ignored that in our and many

other countries what liberties we do possess were won by disobeying bad laws. Other people had to overthrow those who promulgated laws; violence sometimes being needed to depose legalistic dictators from their privileged positions of autocracy.

N.S.S. Branch News

Christian clergymen are having to go after their congregations these days, which may account for a recent willingness to debate with National Secular Society speakers in one or two places. The Manchester Branch was able to arrange a debate with the Methodists in April, when Mr. G. H. Mills represented the Society. In Bradford it was the Baptists—in February, when Mr. H. Day and Mr. F. J. Corina spoke for the N.S.S., and now again. When about to “open up” on Sunday, June 16th, Mr. Day invited the Rev. W. R. Turvey, of Leeds Road Baptist Church, to share the platform with him. Mr. Turvey accepted, and a successful informal debate on Christianity ensued, the speakers taking alternate five minutes. An hour and three quarters passed all too quickly. Now the Dagenham Branch has fixed a debate between the Rev. Mr. Gill, of the Methodist Central Hall, Becontree, and the General Secretary of the N.S.S., to take place at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, July 3rd. Details will be found below.

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In Trinidad (British West Indies) Mr. John T. Jules continues to make valuable contacts in the medical sphere. Mr. J. R. Macdougall, Medical Officer of Health in Sangre-Grande, has responded to an invitation to speak to the Fyzabad Branch. Mr. Jules aptly remarked that, for the Secularist, sanitation, dietetics and health generally are more important than sermons, and Dr. Macdougall is prepared to travel 80 miles or more to discuss preliminary arrangements. We congratulate Mr. Jules on his initiative and Dr. Macdougall on his interest; we are sure that the Doctor will find the N.S.S. members make an enthusiastic audience, and we hope that valuable co-operation will result.

C.McC.

CORRESPONDENCE

A FREETHINKER'S MISFORTUNE

I WAS sorry to read in the U.S. Freethought Journals of the sad misfortune which has befallen Alexander MacKay, a member of the Freethinkers of Southern California and a writer in *Progressive World*.

After three operations Mr. MacKay was left without sight in the right eye and very little in the left. In reply to my note of sympathy to “Mac” I was surprised to receive a well-typed letter of thanks (he is a touch-typist) which was remarkably cheerful for a man in his position.

Although he still takes a “walk up town and back almost daily” reading is out of the question, a sad blow, as he has spent his life “immersed in books.”

Undaunted by his misfortune “Mac” is still actively working for “the best of causes” and his latest article is featured in the *May Progressive World*.

He is a great believer in international solidarity among Freethinkers and I am sure if any British Secularists would like to drop him a line of commiseration it would be greatly appreciated. His address is 850 Foothill Boulevard, San Luis Obispo, California, U.S.A. I am sure all FREETHINKER readers will join me in an expression of sympathy and admiration for his courageous attitude.

D. SHIPPER

THE RUBAIYAT

It is surely amazing that Mr. Ridley should quote Fitzgerald in support of his contentions. I thought every intelligent man was aware that, as a translation, Fitzgerald's work is utterly worthless.

There is no reference to “Jarring Sects” in the Persian quatrains, whether two and seventy or any other number.

Fitzgerald had but a smattering of the language or he would not have needed to read the verses with his Munshi. Mirza Bagir was shocked when Fitzgerald insisted on reading them, for they can best be compared with our college boys' limericks. It is doubtful if Fitzgerald ever did understand many of them — at all events his so-called translation does not suggest it. “A leg of mutton” in the Persian Verse appears as “A book of Verse” in Fitzgerald!

Omar Khayam was a great teacher—renowned far and wide. Nobles and Grandees were pleased to send their sons to his School from great distances.

The teacher collected and published the verses to amuse. If he composed any, it was only a few of them.

The Persian language is so formed that it is comparatively easy to compose simple verses. That is why, so long as there is a demand for them in Europe, new rubaiyat (of Omar Khayam, of course!) will be periodically “discovered.” They bring grist to the mill of translators, but they should not be regarded seriously.

Mr. Ridley's review of Prof. Arberry's book gives no assurance that it is free from Xian animosity to a rival faith. I would recommend readers to consult the (English) works of Syed Amir Ali before reaching conclusions.

W. E. HUXLEY
(Member of the Iran Society)

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19TH.—Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chairman), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Gordon, Hornibrook, Johnson, Pustan, Shepherd, Taylor, Warner, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Conference Report was approved and outstanding motions considered. No. 17 was withdrawn by Central London Branch and No. 18 (by G. F. Nash) was considered inconsistent with our principles and objects. Further information on Endowment would be sought. As suggested by Conference, it was agreed to increase the salary of the General Secretary. Activities of the new Portsmouth Branch were reported and Dagenham's scheme of hospital visiting was explained by Mr. Warner. Preview of the film *Jan Hus* on July 6th and availability on 16mm. noted. Items of correspondence were dealt with; it was agreed the Society should enter the East London Debating Competition; a visit to Nottingham by Mr. Ebury was sanctioned. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, July 17th.

DEBATE

MANKIND'S NEED: CHRISTIANITY OR SECULARISM?

between

The Rev. Mr. Gill (Methodist) and Colin McCall (N.S.S.)
Chairman: E. E. HENNEM

CENTRAL HALL, Bennet's Castle Lane, BECONTREE
(106 or 23 B bus from Barking)

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3rd At 8 p.m.
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